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Two studies of the Self-Directive Dramatization Project are reported. In the first the relationship of dramatization, self-concept, and reading achievement in middle class children in grades 2 through 7 was examined, and in the second mostly black disadvantaged children in grades 1 through 4 were studies. Both groups of children dramatized stories from three to five times a week over periods of 3 months. In both studies gains in reading ability and self-concept during the self-dramatization period were measured, tested against a null hypothesis, and intercorrelated; and in the second study gains by the experimental groups were compared with those of a corresponding control group. The findings of the second study, thought to be more significant than the first, suggested that the experimental groups made greater gains in reading ability than the control especially the grade 2 experimentals, whose gains exceeded expectations. (EF)

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SELF-DIRECTIVE DRAMATIZATION PROJECT

Joliet, Illinois

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IT WORKS

SELF-DIRECTIVE DRAMATIZATION PROJECT
JOLIET, ILLINOIS

One of a Series of

Successful Compensatory Education Programs

UD 007 475

U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
Robert H. Finch, Secretary

Office of Education
Peter P. Muirhead, Acting Commissioner

FOREWORD

This project report is part of an independent study of selected exemplary programs for the education of disadvantaged children completed by the American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences, Palo Alto, Calif., under contract with the U.S. Office of Education.

The researchers report this project significantly improved the educational attainment of the disadvantaged children involved. Other communities, in reviewing the educational needs of the disadvantaged youngsters they serve, may wish to use this project as a model - adapting it to their specific requirements and resources.

Division of Compensatory Education
Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education

THE SELF-DIRECTIVE DRAMATIZATION PROJECT OF JOLIET, ILLINOIS

Introduction

Very briefly, a procedure was developed at Joliet, Illinois, in which a normal school class will form groups of five or six, each composed of children who have found a common interest in one of a number of books or stories made available to the class. Each child in the group selects a character from the story to portray, and each group selects, for the occasion, a leader to help organize the group and to serve as a liaison with the teacher should the occasion arise. Though reading is involved, "self-dramatization" is more than a play-reading; and though dramatization and acting are called for, it is less than a play; no props or costumes are used.

The two investigators developed the rationale and procedure, and then set out to test their hypotheses. There were two studies. In the first relationships of self-directive dramatization, self-concept changes, and reading achievement with middle-class pupils were examined, and in the second, culturally disadvantaged pupils were used.

First Study (all pupils white, mostly middle-class)

1. Twenty-two pupils in grade 3, enrolled in a small laboratory school; the majority were of upper middle-class socio-economic level, but the range was from low to upper levels.

2. The same 22 pupils in grade 4.

3. Thirty-two pupils in grade 3, mostly lower middle-class socio-economic level in a public school of a large city. (Method of sampling not given.)

4. Twenty-four pupils in grade 7, mostly middle-class youth in a laboratory school (not the same school as in 1 above. Sampling method not given).

5. Nineteen pupils in grade 2, mostly farm children in a rural school.

6. Twenty-six pupils in grades 5 and 6, middle-class, in a public school in a large city, heterogeneous in race.

Second Study (predominantly Negro, low socio-economic status)

This was the more important of the two, particularly since control groups were used for comparison purposes. All experimental groups were drawn from a single small public elementary school serving culturally disadvantaged children from a large city. Sampling was done by selecting complete classes. (There was no grading between classes at the same grade level.) Control groups were made up from the remainder of the school, supplemented from a second school with a similar population.

1. Twenty-six pupils in grade 1.

2. Twenty-seven pupils in grade 2.

3. The same twenty-seven pupils in grade 3.

4. Twenty-five pupils in grade 3.

5. Twenty-nine pupils in grade 4.

The school population was from a low socio-economic level, 85 percent Negro, 10 percent white, and 5 percent Mexican and Puerto Rican. "A great many of the children were inadequately clothed and poorly nourished (Carlton and Moore, 1968, p. 62)."

In both studies, children dramatized stories from three to five times a week throughout the dramatization period of 3 1/2 months (continuous). There were two such periods in the year.

There was no specific opposition from parents, though in the second study there was general antagonism from pupils and parents initially, disappearing early in the classroom and later in the community.

In the first study, gains in reading ability and in self-concept over the duration of each self-dramatization period for each group were measured, tested against a null-hypothesis, and intercorrelated.

In the second study the same analyses were done; but in addition, gains by the experimental groups were compared with those of corresponding control groups where possible (a more meaningful comparison).

In all groups, normal schoolwork proceeded whenever self-dramatization was not in progress.

Personnel

A. Project Directors (Part-time; Ph.D.'s; professors of education.)

They designed and supervised the project and trained teachers in special methods used. They collected and analyzed data and were joint authors of several publications.

B. Four teachers, all qualified, three of them experienced and two of these with experience in these methods. Three women, one man. All had had inservice training, and performed normal teacher's duties.

In addition, each supervised self-dramatization of stories, gave reading instruction and reading tests as well as giving self-concept scores to each pupil in their care.

C. The remainder of school staff was indirectly involved since the control groups were from other classes.

All teachers gave normal classes when self-dramatization was not in progress.

Methodology: General

These observations and hypotheses form the foundation upon which the project rests:

1) "... culturally disadvantaged children ... fall behind children without this handicap(,) in educational achievement (Carlton and Moore, 1968, p. 60)."

2) "The lack of a desire to achieve and emotional problems are most often given as the cause for the lack of achievement of culturally disadvantaged children (Carlton and Moore, 1968, p. 60)."

3) "He who values himself highly will strive for high goals while he who has a low opinion of himself will be content with mediocre attainments (Symonds, quoted by Carlton and Moore, 1968, p. 7)." and

"An inadequate concept of self is crippling to an individual (Kelley, quoted by Carlton and Moore, 1968, p. 6)."

4) "The change which occurs in the child as a result of non-directive play therapy experience is a change in self-concept (Bills, quoted by Carlton and Moore, 1968, p. 5)."

5) Carlton and Moore suggest that their method of using books and small groups provides at one and the same time a form of non-directive play-therapy, a crucial area for change in self-concept and a direct and important goal for which to strive - better reading ability. (Carlton and Moore, 1968, pp. 9, 10).

6) Reading ability is obviously basic to learning all other subjects and at all stages of the educational process.

Therefore the claim that Carlton and Moore set out to test, starting with culturally disadvantaged children, was:

Self-directive dramatization → therapy for emotional problems + reading practice → improvement in self-concept and reading ability → increase in desire to achieve, and for higher goals → new leverage in other directions → greater successes.

A brief glossary may be helpful.

Self-directive. The positive aspect of "non-directive;" the teacher maintains an unobtrusive presence but encourages the pupil to make his own decisions and choices - within the framework.

Dramatization. Not play-reading, nor amateur theatricals. "Self-directive dramatization of stories ... is the pupil's own original imaginative spontaneous interpretation of a character of his own choosing in a story which he has selected and read co-operatively with other pupils in his group which was formed for the time being and for a particular story only (Carlton and Moore, 1968, p. 10)."

Self-Concept. "Involves what an individual thinks he is, what he thinks he can do, what he thinks he cannot do (Carlton and Moore, 1968, p. 11)."

Before starting the study, a group intelligence test (California Short Form Test of Mental Maturity), and a reading achievement test (Gray - Votaw - Rogers Achievement Test) were applied. Results from

these were used in the second study, after selection of the experimental groups, to draw individuals from the remainder of the pupils in the Joliet school and from another, to match individuals in the experimental group; sex was an additional matching variate. Control and experimental groups were then checked for significance of differences in socio-economic status.

Also before starting, all pupils in the experimental group were scored on self-concept questions, all of which were put in negative form so that reductions in scores later would indicate self-concept improvement. This check-list was specially devised; here are examples of the items (Carlton and Moore, 1968, pp. 25-27):

A. Associated with Others
   1. Does he withdraw from the teacher?
   5. Does he try to gain favor by agreeing, by giving gifts, or through flattery?

B. Attitude Toward Himself
   2. Does he "brag" about what he can do?

C. Attitude Toward Others
   4. Does he want to do all the talking?

D. When Things Do Not Go Right
   6. Does he act impulsively - hit someone, cry?

E. In Daily Routine
   2. Is he unwilling to take turns?
   7. Does he try to "boss" the other children?

This self-concept check-list was marked for each child by his teacher and where possible by other observers.

All measures were taken for both experimental and control groups and were repeated at the end of the first experimental period of about 3 1/2 months; these posttests also served as pretests for the second period, at the end of which all measures were applied for the third time.

The only special materials used consisted of about 200 books in all, containing stories suitable for each grade level, there being a few score books for each level. Although for a start these were fiction, there were also factual, biographical and historical books.

To get children started, the teacher selected about five stories for a class of 25 to 30 pupils, with varying reading levels; she listed these and the characters involved on the chalk-board in order to demonstrate the procedure to be followed without her help thereafter. Each pupil then selected the story he wished to read with others in a group; the number of characters involved determined the size of the group. There would be five or six such groups who then gathered in different parts of the room, and pupils took turns at reading parts of stories aloud until the story had been read. Each pupil then selected the character he wished to portray when the story was dramatized. Conflicts in choices were resolved by the children themselves. Groups then took turns in dramatizing the story for the rest of the class. No rehearsals, costumes or props were used, and a leader was chosen in each group anew for each story. This leader helped in organization and prompting, and he called for help from the teacher in pronunciation, or for any other problems which the children could not solve for themselves. On all occasions after the first, children went through the whole process of selecting stories, grouping themselves, selecting characters, choosing a leader, resolving conflicts, etc., with minimal assistance from the teacher. However, especially after a child had requested it and high-lighted the need, children were given opportunities to read to the teacher, who was concerned to do remedial work where necessary.

Methodology: Specific

Examples of stories (and books) used are (see Carlton and Moore, 1968, pp. 110-131):

Grade 1: Merry-go-round, "The Little Red Hen," Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co.
Up and Away, "Pails and Pails of Paint," Houghton Mifflin Company.

Grade 2: Friends and Neighbors, "City Mouse and Country Mouse," Scott, Foresman and Co.
Come Along, "Traffic Policeman," Houghton Miffling Company.

Grade 7: Parades, "The Story of Penicillin," Scott, Foresman and Co.
High Trails, "Mama and the Graduation Present," Allyn and Bacon Inc.

Evaluation

A. Measures of Achievement

There are a few dubious elements in the reporting which should be got out of the way first, since, if anything, they cloud an otherwise clear issue.

In the first place, a positive and healthy concept of self holds an important place in the rationale and probably rightly so. However, the items used are at best indirect indices, calling for subjective decisions. Correlations between gains on this measure and those on reading reached high values (about .7) supporting the hypothesis in the first study - and zero or even negative values in the second where confirmation was needed more urgently. An assumption of poor validity for this test instrument is all that is needed to simplify the evaluation; gains in reading ability are real enough.

Secondly, the investigators relied on significance testing of gains in reading ability, a great deal in the first study and in part in the second. But demonstration that a gain is too large to be a chance deviation from zero gain is at best an argument for education, not for a particular method. Fortunately the data was presented fully enough to permit of more rigorous testing, and these figures will be quoted in preference.

Lastly, the control groups in the second study were gathered by selecting individuals out of the remainder of the classes in the original school and from a second school adjudged similar; these individuals were selected to match those in the experimental groups on four aspects simultaneously, namely grade, sex, pretest reading ability, and IQ. On the face of it this is quite a rigorous way of providing comparable control groups, but it includes a false assumption made only too often by educationalists, and that is that matching on IQ cannot increase biases in sampling, but can reduce them. In fact, it can introduce systematic biases if the two groups are not randomly selected from the same population; this should be immediately obvious when it is realized that children with different chronological ages paired on IQ will automatically have different mental ages or capacities. Notice that there is no saving clause in a claim that modern "standard deviation IQ's" (e.g., WISC) and not the older ratio IQ's (e.g., Stanford-Binet) were used. The correct variates to use are chronological age and mental age, or the product of chronological age and IQ, or raw score on the test; both are important and must be kept separate.

In this case, biases introduced are almost certainly negligible, but such grounds for suspicion should be avoided in future replications.

In the first study, in all grades, on every occasion, posttest scores exceeded pretest values, gains being significant at beyond the 1 percent levels. As already pointed out, these are relatively trivial demonstrations; in fact this study is not a particularly valuable contribution anyway. However, on the assumption that normal progress

over a 3 1/2 month period would have been .35 of a grade-year, gains in grade 3 and grade 4 were still significantly beyond this value at beyond the 1 percent level.

Data presented for the other grades in this study are not given in a form which allowed us to compute the more appropriate values. Common sense, using the t-values given, leaves no room for doubt that each self-dramatization period in each grade led to gains which exceeded expectations at highly significant levels.

What does temper our enthusiasm is that the mean IQ's of these groups exceeded 100, and by perhaps enough to account for the high gains.

The second study is more important and more convincing even though, as mentioned earlier, the self-concept test proved disappointing.

The grade 2 class had two self-dramatization periods; in both, the gains exceeded the expected .35 grade years by far more than would have yielded significances at even the 0.1 percent level; and expectations for these children would have been less than .35 grade years.

The overall gain in reading ability for the two periods exceeded that of the control group by more than 1/2 a grade year, and significant at beyond the 0.1 percent level.

The same two groups were compared on gains in other subjects (arithmetic?). The difference favored the experimental group at beyond the 1 percent level (value re-calculated).

Finally, this grade was followed to grade 3 to test the performance of gains in reading, spelling, and arithmetic. Gains exceeded the expectations of 2 grade years by enough to claim significance at beyond the 0.1 percent level in each case.

For all other comparisons of gains in reading ability between experimental and control groups in grades 1, 3, and 4, the experimental group was superior at never less than the 2 percent level.

B. Other Evaluation Indices

Although the principal aim of the study was to perform a fairly rigorously controlled experiment to test objectively the contributions to several criterion variates of a single component of treatment, there were by-products which the authors found convenient to illustrate anecdotically; a few are appended:

1. At the beginning of the year, in all classes, a large proportion of children could not sit still, seemed to be excitable, talking continuously but with few listeners; were quarrelsome and aggressive and resistant to approaches. There seems to have been a fair amount of antagonism directed towards all teachers. This gradually improved so that before long enthusiasm was being shown for the program in general and each teacher in particular. One child who quite literally cried all the time in spite of every attempt to soothe her, eventually gave up crying and took her place in the program. Another who in the beginning used to call out to the teacher "You old white woman, you leave me alone," changed this later to "You old black woman ..." and finally signalled her complete acceptance by addressing a friendly and enthusiastic letter to the investigators.

2. Changes in individual self-concept were sometimes striking. One boy with an IQ of 140 with a reading level of only 1.8 in third grade refused to play with other children at the start, or to join in their reading groups. When he did join, at first he elected to play bad and aggressive characters and did so with an energy which amazed the teacher. He suddenly changed to portraying a different type of character, and by the end of the dramatization period showed a self-concept change from 13 negative indications, down to two, and had a reading gain of 1 0 years.

3. Approval of parents and the community in general was shown by consent to have a book illustrated with photos of some of their children; also by an imperative demand by one of the rough diamonds of the community, that if the two authors were not back to continue their work the following year, he would come to fetch them!

C. Modifications and Suggestions

In discussion, the investigators suggested little in the way of needed alterations to procedure, but rather "more of the same":

Longer periods
More books
More direct teacher preparation
Longer research period, and above all -
More financial support.

They would like to study the effects of class size, more contact with the parents, and of supplementary feeding.

Budget

The total cost of the program was nominally about $7,400, of which about $3,000 was spent on salaries, and another $3,000 on instructional material. The remainder was absorbed in travel, clerical and testing costs. Teachers were on regular employment, and overhead costs were absorbed by institutions involved.

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* The Office of Education is collecting this material for placement in the ERIC system. Items may be obtained either in microfiche or hard copy.

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